

**Commission on
Human Rights and
Opportunities**

Memo

To: Labor and Public Employees Committee
From: Tanya A. Hughes, Executive Director
Date: February 17, 2015
Re: ██████████, AN ACT PROTECTING INTERNS FROM WORKPLACE
HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities **SUPPORTS** SB 428, An Act Protecting Interns from Workplace Harassment and Discrimination.

Federal law provides that paid interns are considered employees. The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities interprets our current state laws to cover unpaid interns as well. That position has not been tested by Connecticut courts, but courts in other jurisdictions have ruled against unpaid interns. SB 428 will remove all doubt in the courts of Connecticut.

We believe Connecticut should join other states that have passed laws to protect unpaid interns from workplace harassment and discrimination. Oregon, New York, Illinois and California have all passed laws protecting interns from discrimination in recent years. Texas and Michigan are currently considering similar laws.

Interns are easily victimized. They undertake months of free labor hoping to gain real world experience and make connections in their chosen fields. They do not come to work to be sexually harassed or called foul words because of their race or color. They may need accommodation because of a physical or mental disability.

Receiving a pay check should not be a difference maker when important workplace rights are at stake. Because interns are often young with little workplace experience putting this legal requirement in place alerts all employers that discrimination and harassment in the workplace is illegal for all.

To clarify current state law the Commission proposes the following amendment to the definition of "employee" in CONN. GEN. STAT. § 46a-51(9):

(9) "Employee" means any person employed by an employer, including an unpaid intern, but shall not include any individual employed by such individual's parents, spouse or child, or in the domestic service of any person;

Thank you for willingness to correct this oversight in Connecticut statutes.